



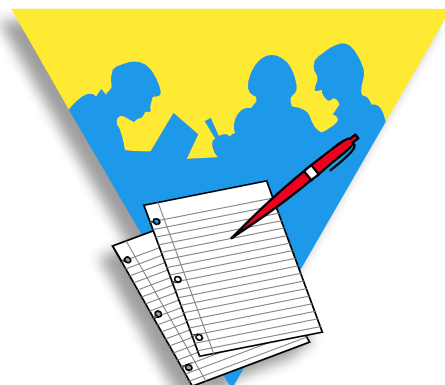
Coffee Break Training - Fire Investigation Series

Fire/Arson and Explosion Investigation Curriculum: Interviewing/Interrogation: 10 Common Indicators of Deception - Part 2

No. FI-2013-7 July 1, 2013

Learning Objective: The student shall be able to list and explain 10 signs of deception that untruthful suspects often exhibit during an interview.

In Part 1, the following five of the 10 signs that can be used to detect possible deception in written and oral statements, indicating that an individual may be withholding, altering or fabricating information, were outlined: lack of self-reference; verb tense; answering questions with questions; equivocation; and oaths. Listed below are the remaining five signs of deception that investigators should focus on when conducting interviews or interrogations, or reviewing written statements:



- 1. Euphemisms** — there are numerous alternative terms for almost any action or event. Statements made by guilty individuals often include mild or vague words rather than their harsher, more explicit synonyms. Euphemisms portray the subject's behavior in a more favorable light and minimize any harm the subject's actions might have caused. Investigators should look for the use of terms such as: "missing" instead of "stolen," "borrowed" instead of "took," and "warned" instead of "threatened."
- 2. Alluding to actions** — people sometimes allude to actions without saying that they actually performed them. They will often make references to the way something should have been done rather than explicitly stating what they actually did. Investigators should not assume that subjects perform every action they allude to.
- 3. Lack of detail** — truthful statements usually contain specific details, some of which may not even be relevant to the question asked. This occurs because truthful subjects are retrieving events from long-term memory, and our memories store dozens of facts about each experience — e.g., the song that was playing on the radio, the conversation that was interrupted when the telephone rang. At least some of these details will usually appear in a truthful subject's statement. Those who fabricate a story, however, tend to keep their statements simple and brief. Few liars have sufficient imagination to make up detailed descriptions of fictitious events. Plus, a deceptive person wants to minimize the risk that an investigator will discover evidence contradicting any aspect of his or her statement.
- 4. Narrative balance** — a narrative consists of three parts: prologue, critical event and aftermath. The prologue contains background information and describes events that took place before the critical event. The critical event is the most important occurrence in the narrative. The aftermath describes what happened after the critical event. In a complete and truthful narrative, the balance will be approximately 20 to 25 percent prologue, 40 to 60 percent critical event and 25 to 35 percent aftermath. If one part of the narrative is significantly shorter than expected, important information may have been omitted. If one part of the narrative is significantly longer than expected, it may be padded with false information.
- 5. Mean length of utterance** — the average number of words per sentence is called the "mean length of utterance." The MLU equals the total number of words in a statement divided by the number of sentences. Most people tend to speak in sentences of between 10 and 15 words. When people feel anxious about an issue, they tend to speak in sentences that are either significantly longer or significantly shorter than the norm. Investigators should pay particular attention to sentences for which length differs significantly from the subject's MLU.

(Source: Clikeman, Paul M., *The 10 Tell-Tale Signs of Deception*, *Fraud Magazine*, January/February 2012.)

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